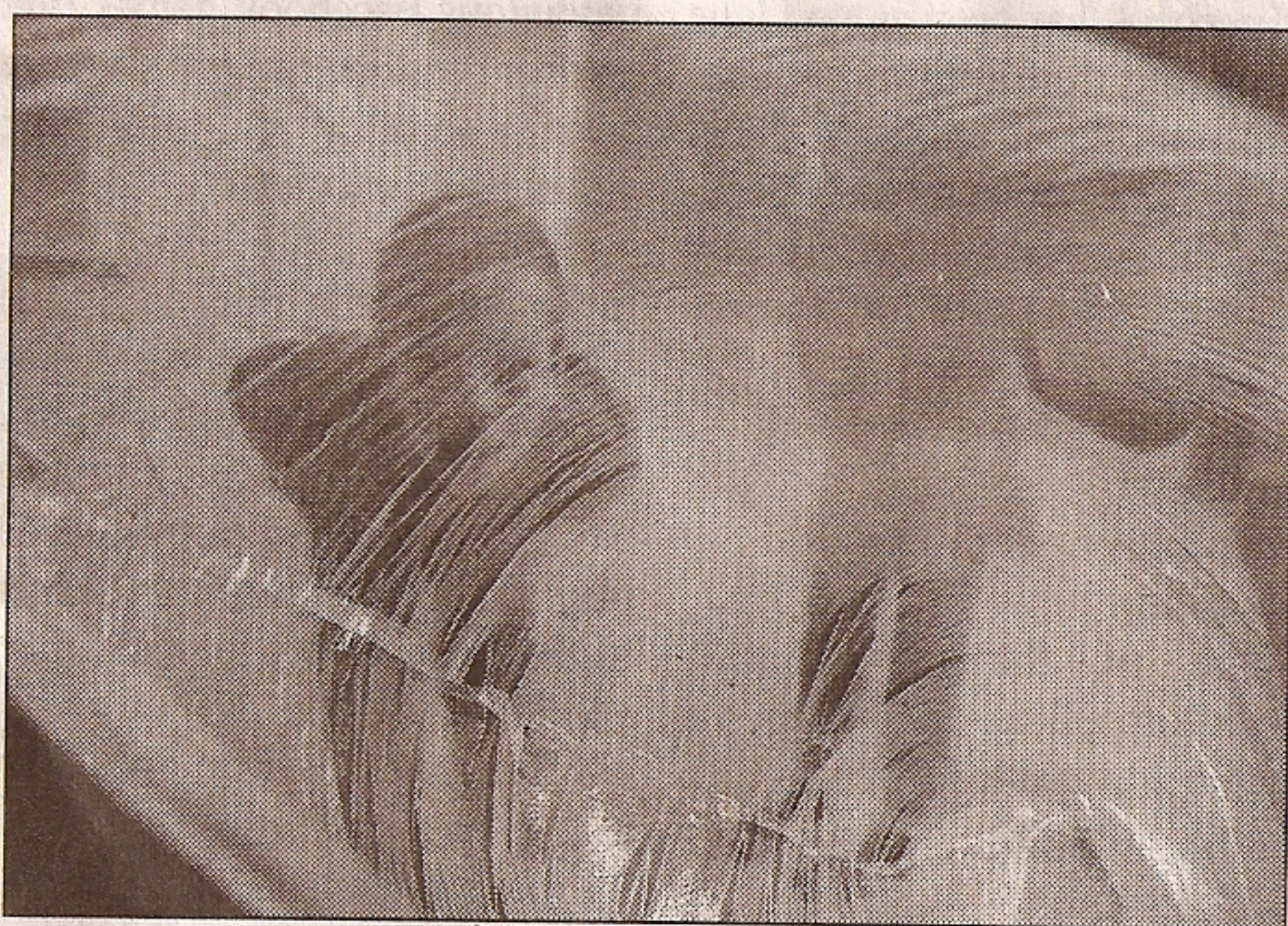


In the belly of the whale

AES students get an inside look into one of the largest animals in the world

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Amesbury Elementary students look into what would be a finback whale's fin.

For one day earlier this week, Amesbury Elementary's gymnasium was turned into perhaps the largest fish tank north of the New England Aquarium. Missing, however, was water, sand, a scuba diver and, oh yes, fish.

What the gym had instead was a 55-foot-long replica of a finback whale made out of an unlikely material: garbage bags. Keeping the whale inflated was a household box fan attached to what would be the whale's tale.

The whale was brought to the school by members of the Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation in Portsmouth, N.H.

Classes spent about 15 minutes in the belly of the whale and learned more about what makes the giant mammals tick.

"They're very excited," Blue Ocean Executive Director Jennifer Kennedy. "It's a little hard to keep them listening, but they've been very good."

Around mid-morning on Monday, Kennedy led third-grade teacher Cathy Jackson's class into the whale after all the kids had taken off their shoes. As the students sat on the floor, Kennedy

described where the whale's internal would be and how a whale has many of the same features as humans.

Kennedy talked about how female whales nurse their young, how they excrement waste and how the breathe through a blowhole.

The purpose of the whale model, Kennedy said, is to increase awareness of the area's marine environment. In addition to the whale model, students spent some time at two different stations: one that showed whalebones and baleen and another showing how pollution affects the finback whale's environment.



Jennifer Kennedy from Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation discusses the inner most details of a finback whale to third-graders at Amesbury Elementary.